

## UNIVERSAL POLITICAL FORMS

Disidentifying from the enchanting and constricting power  
of political ideologies and developing our own position

### INTRODUCTION

We live in a sea of political ideas and programs which are presented forcefully and persuasively by powerful and penetrating media technology. In our study of Psychosynthesis we learn to disidentify from aspects of our personalities and from other structures of our conscious and unconscious lives. Political ideologies and movements are particularly important and powerful elements of our lives and consciousness, ones which often have deep and largely unexamined segments which also may be intertwined and attached to elements of our conscious and unconscious lives. These forms also show up in our social, professional, and spiritual organizations without being obviously political. If we are to engage in Social Psychosynthesis, we must learn to recognize, name, and then disidentify from these political forms or ideologies. We may then begin to see the whole of the “body politic” and be in a more conscious place from which we may exercise our political and collective will more intelligently and responsibly. Recalling Assagioli’s “Balance and Synthesis of Opposites”, we may identify with one of the contending positions in a conflict, yet we must also be aware of the synthesizing category which may solve the conflict from a higher position.

### THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

The pathos and hopelessness of 20<sup>th</sup> century society and its wars were foreseen in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by the English poet, Matthew Arnold:

Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another, for the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

-Arnold, (from Dover Beach)

In the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> and in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the notion of ethical behavior by governments, corporations, and many other social institutions came to be viewed with alarm as with moral crisis by many, with cynicism by some, and as humorously absurd by a few. The 2000 election was a sorry display of vote manipulation in Florida and an unseemly and improper intervention by the US Supreme Court prematurely declaring one candidate President

of the United States. This president's response to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York has evolved into a reckless policy of pre-emptive war which promises to give precedent to any nation who wishes to attack any other nation. The stock market was nearly crashed by the illegal and unethical behavior of several large corporations causing many thousands of workers to lose their life retirement while enriching executives. During the last several decades public schools lost the initiative in preparing citizens for democratic life. The institution also tried to stay out of trouble in local community, teachers and counselors were cautioned by their administrators not to teach (controversial) values. Values could be taught indirectly, it was thought, through reading and discussing literature, participating in athletics, playing values-clarification games, etc.. But it wouldn't do to deal directly with controversial human issues where values were paramount (abortion, feminism, communism, racism and other chauvinisms, war and the draft, resistance to them, etc.). Such issues were volatile and uncontrollable (read emotional), dangerous to the stability of the local institution. Students should learn how to think about such things at home. The foundations of democratic society were not a priority in the curriculum, teaching civic principles took a back seat to teaching technological principles. The result has been a dummied down of civic awareness, a loss of awareness of democratic principles.

Now at the turn of the millennium the shadow side of empirical science as a guiding intellectual form for the evolution of culture is visiting us with a vengeance. The evolution of technology has long outstripped the evolution of values and purpose required for the cultivation of responsible stewardship for the general welfare of humanity and for the health of our planet (for an informed discussion of what he calls "the dark side of growth", see F. Capra, The Turning Point, 1982). More fundamentally, the metaphysical maps and competent social structures to hold such an evolution of values and purpose are exhausted (see R. Bellah, The Good Society, 1993). Many of our current crises in human community and in ecology can be traced directly or indirectly to this situation (for an impressive list, passionately presented, see J. Schell, The Fate of the Earth, 1982). Mythologically speaking, we have like Faust traded our soul for knowledge and got technology; a poor bargain indeed. For without our soul, our purpose-in-becoming, we are doomed to some hell of ethical entropy leading back to barbarism. This dismal prospect was poetically predicted more specifically, also near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by the English poet, William Butler Yeats, (It seems that great artists and poets are often several decades ahead of their time). An excerpt follows:

Things fall apart: the center cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

-William Butler Yeats  
(From The Second Coming)

Yet there is ample evidence for hope in the possibilities of a better future. The awakening of the human spirit and its alignment with a deeper, more fundamental evolutionary process in the Universe can be seen. Who would have predicted the dismantlement of the USSR and its satellites? The rise of constitutional government with a Black majority in South Africa? Both

without major wars. Many new experiments in community are being tried, (see McLaughlin and Davidson, Spiritual Politics, 1994; and J. Wallace, The Soul of Politics, 1995). A cry for meaning and purpose within a larger movement toward the rebuilding of metaphysical infrastructure is underway (see E. Schumacher, A Guide for the Perplexed, 1980).

This general situation with its negatives and positives affects most human activity in the contemporary Western world. It includes individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, governments, and societies. For example, a particular group or corporation which is to be examined for evidence of distortion involving shadow activity and/or a special quality such as luminous potential may logically be expected, therefore, to be affected by the larger unconscious patterns of the society. To understand this we need ways to identify the political thought-forms and ideologies driving groups of people, ourselves included, in the society. Thus, a model which is capable of describing a large and complex picture is needed.

### A MODEL FOR ANALYSIS

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century political sociologist, Karl Mannheim, lamented the absence of even a minimal science of politics in a time of strong scientific rationalism. Mannheim, a non-Jewish German, saw the disintegration of ethical politics, community values, and social infrastructure with the coming rise of the Nazis and left Germany before Hitler took power. He taught in universities in England and the US. Writing in the 1930's he said, "There is scarcely a sphere of life about which we do not have some scientific as well as recognized methods of communicating this knowledge... is it conceivable then, that the sphere of human activity on the mastery of which our fate rests is so unyielding that scientific research cannot force it to give up its secrets? The disquieting and puzzling features of this problem cannot be disregarded" (Mannheim, 1926, p. 110). Mannheim was trying to understand the utopian impulse in politics, especially as it relates to the rise of fascism as a utopian political theory in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Mannheim believed that human communities, at least in the West, carried some basic, idealistic images of how human community should ultimately function. These images were utopian since a deep theme in group life was an expectation that a near perfection of government was possible in which nearly all of the distortions and malfunctions would finally be remedied and human organization would finally be capable of meeting the group needs of humans without major disruptions. This view was disparagingly called "The Liberal Rhetoric" by the American sociologist, C. Wright Mills, about the middle of the century. But there is no doubt that it is a deep theme in the collective Western psych. This is borne out in the utopian theme of ideal community in our collective mythologies; for example, Camelot (English), El Dorado (Spanish), Valhalla (Norse), Zion (Hebrew), Shangri-la (Himalayan). Etc..

Mannheim proposed five levels or types of such utopian images of community as the universal themes that occur in human reflection about community as these images show up in political forms. Following are the primary examples he sites in the time order of their evolution:

-Bureaucratic Conservatism - can be efficient, predictable, automatic, reliable, systematic, a way to get large numbers of people to do relatively uncomplicated but necessary tasks.

-Romantic Historicism - can be powerful, strongly motivating, ethically binding, promoting of *esprit de corps* in a group, promoting of self-awareness and self-confidence through discovering and celebrating identity roots.

-Interest group Liberalism - can be liberating for the individual, promoting and celebrating of individual freedom, dynamic and interactive, promoting of collaboration, connecting of emotions and mind in discourse; this is the form that seems to have the most democratic content in our era.

-The Socialist/Communist Conception - (despite the negative image it has inherited because of its distorted manifestations) can be noble and evocative of the group's principles and values, orderly and rational, egalitarian in access, mentally and managerially responsible, plan-full, centrally accountable.

-Fascism - (despite its nearly universal negative image because of its great capacity for distortion, as we shall see) can be visionary, intuitive, spiritually authentic (beyond rational mundanity), capable of bold action, inspired, charismatic, strongly motivating, very creative, can mount necessary leadership in a crisis, it is probably the central energy manifested by great generals and great revolutionaries.

In the following table I have listed the forms in ascending order, as Mannheim listed them, comparing them with corresponding aspects of subjective experience from individual life. These are listed in their normal sequence of growth in human development, ie. The body, the desires, the emotions, the mind, and the spirit. These aspects or sequential identifications as he called them were suggested by Roberto Assagioli, MD, the founder of Psychosynthesis. He recommended them as analogs of human identifications at differing levels of consciousness for understanding larger human systems. Each is then described imaginally using a quote which I have chosen which attempts to capture its essence. Finally, examples of the form are offered as they may manifest in history. The table will be followed by explanations in more detail.

(Note: Please read from the bottom up)

## STANDARD DISTORTIONS OF UTOPIAN POLITICAL FORMS

ACCORDING TO KARL MANNHEIM - AMPLIFIED BY THE AUTHOR

INDIVIDUAL ANALOG	POLITICAL FORM (DISTORTION)	CHARACTERISTIC QUOTE	EXAMPLES (NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE)
SPIRIT	FASCISM	"THE HERO OF THE AGE WHO HAS COME FROM BEYOND HISTORY TO SET THINGS RIGHT"	NAZI GERMANY OR THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION (prior to Establishing constitution)
MIND	THE SOCIALIST/ COMMUNIST CONCEPTION	"FROM EVERYONE ACCORDING HIS ABILITY, TO EVERYONE ACCORDING TO HIS NEED"	SOVIET UNION (until recently) OR THE LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS
EMOTIONS	INTEREST-GROUP LIBERALISM	"THE SQUEAKY WHEEL GETS THE GREASE" OR "LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY!"	U. S. GOVERNMENT OR CHICAGO CITY GOVERNMENT
DESIRES	CONSERVATIVE HISTORICISM	"A MAN'S A MAN FOR ALL THAT" OR "BACK TO THE GOOD OLD DAYS"	NEW ETHNIC REPUBLICS OF EASTERN EUROPE OR THE "MORAL MAJORITY"
BODY	BUREAUCRATIC CONSERVATISM	"THERE'S NO DEMOCRATIC WAY TO LAY A SEWER PIPE"	THE ROMAN EMPIRE OR THE U.S. BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS OR MANY LOCAL HOSPITALS

Following are several explanations of the meaning of the table; let us start at the bottom. Implications for shadow manifestation will be discussed after the chart is explained.

**BUREAUCRATIC CONSERVATISM** is government - become - administration. It is rational in a left-brain (linear, non-intuitive) sense. It is associated with the body because it prides itself on being systematic, orderly, predictable, rational, automatic. These are qualities often associated with the experience of the body which does its job without much attention and contains a large number of automatic systems. When things are going well it doesn't require much conscious intervention, but when it is "sick" everything else is put on hold and the attention of higher functions are required, often at the expense of more complex goals. This could be seen as analogous to "crisis administration" in organizational life. This form has been with us for a very long time as the example of the Roman Empire suggests. Oppressive and undemocratic by nature the form is largely uncreative and shows limited innovation; it is often a feature of colonialist governments which are controlled by a foreign power. It tends to avoid the risks associated with finding meaning and purpose. It is notorious for resisting change. Pioneer

Sociologist, Max Weber's, observation about leadership: "That which begins as charisma in time crystallizes to become bureaucracy", is instructive here. The quote given in the table is attributed to former Mayor La Guardia of New York City.

CONSERVATIVE HISTORICISM is romantic in nature. It may attempt to appear rational but under scrutiny the primacy of desires becomes clear. This is the essential dynamic by which the fascists in Europe hijacked the philosophy of Romanticism and finally disparaged it totally as a legitimate, life-guiding philosophy. It had taken a number of serious blows before this, particularly from the rationalistic philosophy of the enlightenment, Positivism, a major expression of modern science. Essentially non-intuitive and non-rational this form resonates to the deep human impulse to keep things the way they are, and the wish to go back to a simpler time; "back to the good old days". This impulse is often exploited by politicians and others; former U.S. President Ronald Reagan used it expertly. The psychological mechanism of "retrospective inhibition", the tendency to recall events from the past as better or more pleasant than they actually were, is important here. "Nostalgia", as the American philosopher, Pierce, observed is "Remembrance of the past with the pain removed". It seems that former U.S.S.R. President, Mikhail Gorbachev, seriously underestimated this impulse, particularly in that it often manifests in the attraction of ethnic and religious homocentrism. This celebration of nostalgic ethnic and religious identifications of the past at the expense of reasoned analysis of the realities of the present were primary in the regression of some of the Balkan republics to a form of tribal warfare which greatly blocked their progress as emerging free states. Finding one's roots is an important identity development stage in healthy psycho-social growth (see E. Erickson, Childhood and Society, 1963). But it can also be a serious block to community integration if old prejudices are the level at which many people's psycho-social maturity is arrested. Racism in the United States is also a clear example and "the race card" is played frequently in American politics these days. The quote is from the Scottish poet, Bobby Burns' poem of the same name.

INTEREST GROUP LIBERALISM is the form of government prevalent in the United States, and to a large extent in Western Europe. It is particularly visible in the U.S. Congress. It attempts to present itself as rational but is more accurately associated with the emotions, the primary source of raw power and energy in the human personality as Assagioli has noted. The subjective experience of powerful emotions is often such that we can experience them vic for power and control within our personalities resulting in the experience of conflict, confusion, and fatigue. The development of the mind and the integration of its structural, rational capacity along with its intuitive capacity with the power and motivation of the emotions is a major developmental task in our time at the level of individual growth. The analogous implications for mature group life are many. Such governments are usually democratic in form but far short of real democratic content as the reference to "interest groups" implies.

It is interesting to note that the classical definition of "liberal" points to a philosophy that values the individual and his/her freedom above the good of the community, even sometimes above the good of the family. This is why capitalism and the entrepreneurial spirit are classical liberal ideas since they value the free individual in a free market even though the social movements thus spawned destroy many local communities and put families under great stress.

Through the forces of economic growth many value-rich rural communities have been converted into anonymous urban centers where values are often lost and sometimes discarded. There is much confusion currently about what is liberal and what is conservative. This form is the primary liberal one in this respect. Philosophies which place the community and its value-forming and value-enforcing processes in priority over individual freedom are, classically, conservative forms. In this sense the other four forms are more often conservative in nature. The first quote is self-evident, the second is the motto of the French revolution. I included Chicago as an example in that its city government is a vital marketplace of political forces (read emotions), many less than rational, and yet the city continues to function with a minimum of bureaucratic structures such as civil service and other "good government" shields to keep the City Administration insulated from often raucous political forces.

**SOCIALIST/COMMUNIST CONCEPTIONS** are usually stridently rational. Policies and programs are theoretically the result of a sophisticated framework of dialectical thinking and discussion. The form abhors the irrationality and unpredictability of emotions in its planning and managing processes. Although it may realize the psychological importance of emotions in morale, communications, and raw energy, it usually represses them directly or indirectly. This results in the same types of pathology at the group level as are commonly known at the individual level, depression (loss of morale), burn-out (disconnecting from purpose), confusion (mind overrun by emotions), etc. Opting for central planning and central control, this form is perhaps the most utopian in its conscious rhetoric. The public schools example is meant to show that the form doesn't have to be a foreign government but often occurs in our own community. Schools are publically owned and operated. Their boards of directors are publically elected. Schools are usually rational, mental, and prefer central planning and control. The quote is aptly idealistic, an aphorism attributed to Friedrich Engels, co-author with Carl Marks of *The Communist Manifesto*. Usually declaring a preference for democratic processes, this form often can't stomach the chaos that goes with them. Identifying with the mind, this form often leaps to Bureaucratic Conservatism or else to Fascism during a crisis. It often doesn't later reestablish with much democratic content. It seems to want to avoid the level of natural tension present in a more open play of political forces; thus, the form is often seen as a model of fascism or as a version of colonial bureaucracy rather than as a democratic version of state socialism. Perhaps the mind, harmonized with the emotions and matured through individuation (Carl Jung's word for coming to grips with one's inner opposite and transcending an immature, tyrannical ego) would be capable holding the depth of wisdom and service implied by this form. The Scandinavian countries are often thought to be socialist in their forms, but these countries, while having a lot of public ownership of institutions, also have thriving private sectors which are capitalistic in nature. It is hard to imagine a society yet existing which is mature enough to be capable of handling a socialistic or communistic government in any nearly pure form while also having vibrant and healthy democratic institutions.

**FASCISM**, the final form, is relatively new as a theoretical framework, appearing for the first time with serious, articulate advocates in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It involves a deliberate, aggressive use of will, therefore, its association with the spirit. The name, Fascism, is so inflammatory that another name might be better, but none is as well understood; eg.,

totalitarianism, dictatorship, fascism, imperialism; all are used to refer to forms of enforced, nondemocratic empire. In serious debate the form is often presented as deliberately a-rational; it also may be presented as intuitive and spiritual, sometimes as representing psychic powers. Italian fascist leader, Benito Mussolini, published writings proposing and defending fascism (he is known as the "Father of fascism"). In a 1925 political speech he said the following:

Our program is quite simple; we wish to rule over Italy,  
People are always asking us about our programme, There  
are too many already, Italy's salvation does not depend  
on programmes but on men and strong wills.

(Quoted in Mannheim, 1936).

Power is more clearly understood than it usually is in other political forms and the role of activist elites in history is pondered and studied. History itself, however, is often considered pedestrian and largely irrelevant except as a factor in timing and tactics (see Z. Sternhell, The Birth of Fascist Ideology, 1994, and R. Griffin, Fascism, 1995). The apotheosis (glorifying, deifying) of imagination, intuition, and action, especially in the person of a hero, is a common theme. Christian writers sometimes compare such images to that of the Anti-Christ, the evil, deceiver spirit who parades as the returning Christ, predicted in the New Testament Book of Revelations. The leader, usually a dynamic and charismatic person, is cast dramatically as the hero or heroine and is sometimes described in mythological terms. Adolph Hitler, the fascist leader of the German Third Reich, commissioned a top film-maker of the time, Leni Reifenstahl, to create a film depicting him as the "Hero of the Age". The film, "The Triumph of the Will", opens with Hitler descending from the skies in a dramatically designed and appointed aircraft which lands sensationally amid joyous cheers by thousands of German workers and soldiers whom Hitler then addresses (see Reifenstahl, 1936). The full quote is from a fanatical, proto-Nazi writer, F. Yockey, writing in the tradition of Oswald Spengler. Yockey writes under the pseudonym, Ulick Varange, a book, Imperium, 1948/1983, in which he indirectly extols Adolph Hitler and predicts the emergence of a new "Hero".

General George Washington's use of this energy in a positive way as revolutionary military commander is worth reflection. The American Revolution was not a democratic exercise, but upon its successful conclusion, Washington, who was not a fascist ideologue, did not seize power as General Franco did following the Spanish Revolution, and as many other successful revolutionary leaders have. Washington angrily rejected a proposal that he use the army to become a king. His modeling of principles of democracy was exemplary in his self-constraint in the process of the forging of the American Constitution, despite the efforts of many to invest sovereign or dictatorial power in him. He was elected president twice, declined a third term, then stepped down from office to retire as a normal citizen.

Our own time of media persuasion, "double-speak", and the colonization of consciousness through the manufacturing, engineering, and manipulation of symbols makes the prospects for distortion of fascist energy particularly dangerous, especially in the "politics of spiritual community". Wisdom, critical thinking and spiritual discernment are needed in more



universal, sophisticated, and penetrating ways in our time.

## APPLICATION

How are we to use this information, these five universal political forms and their energies which seem to show up most clearly in their negative distortion, often their shadow forms?

A moment of reflection will probably show us how we each have used or embodied some aspect of each and all of these forms in our personal lives, in our families, our work, our organizations, and in our own personalities. Learning from Assagioli about the power of disidentification: "We are controlled by those aspects of ourselves with which we are identified and we can control and utilize those aspects from which we disidentify", we can learn to recognize these patterns of political thought in our environment. We then can step back from and begin to understand and use these forms in more positive ways in our own ethical and ideological stance on important life issues in community. We can use them all as needed, alone and in combination. As we gain awareness and skill in evaluating these forms we can also gain wisdom and experience in recognizing and transforming their common shadow manifestations, first in our own psyches, then in our encounters with the world. Embracing the shadow energy consciously, liberating and transforming it, then expressing it in its higher form gives us a choice to express with power and vitality the "high road" version of these forms in the same manner as anger and rage can become power which is directed to the good, fear can become sensitivity, criticism and judgement can become quality discernment, resentful care-taking can become genuine compassion, ungrounded mysticism can become authentic spiritual power, etc..

Following is an exercise to help us to identify the energies of these forms in various aspects of our lives:

## EXERCISE

(This exercise may be done alone or it may be led in a group setting. Allow approximately one hour).

### STEP 1

-Imagine yourself to be observing and experiencing the political forms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the force of politics, the presence of national and local government, campaigns of candidates for office, the blare of the media, etc.. Try to experience each of the forms implied in the situations below, allow for negative and/or positive experience:

- an encounter with a local bureaucracy
- the impulse to return to a simpler time
- the scrambling and competing of ideas and programs for your attention
- the impulse for systematic order, fairness, rationality
- the powerful draw and charismatic excitement of a persuasive leader who seems to have spiritual authenticity.

### STEP 2

-Reflect and write about your own awareness of these forms and the style of leadership which may have represented each of the forms in your life in the following arenas:

- in your own family of origin
- in work environments in which you are now working or have worked
- in a community you are living in now or have lived in previously
- in your own personality, with yourself and your subpersonalities, with others, in your current family situation.

### STEP 3

- Breathe deeply, relax your body, calm your emotions, quiet your mind
- Imagine yourself standing as an observer looking at your life from a disidentified place
- Record your thoughts and feelings about your experiences of these forms from this vantage point.  
What's it like to see these leadership styles from here?

### STEP 4

- Allow yourself to imagine how you might be and act if you could choose how you could do so.  
How would you respond to these forms in your life?
- Imagine yourself free and capable of knowing and following your own intentions
- appreciate the power and freedom of your will
- try at least one situation in each arena (family, work, community, your personality).
- See yourself taking some action, intentionally and appropriately in each arena.
- Record your thoughts and feelings.

### STEP 5

- Reflect on and write about the question:  
-What is the right next step for me in taking charge of my responses to these forms in my own personality? In my family? In my work? In community?

- What intentional action might I initiate?
- Talk to at least one other person about your answers and your experience with this exercise.

NOTE: The central concepts and ideas for these materials are drawn largely from: Mannheim, Karl, Ideology and Utopia, 1936. New York: Harcourt and Brace.

Prepared by Dennis Wynne  
Psychosynthesis Institute of Minnesota  
(651) 644-2267